9-21-1994

Interview: Robert Anderson

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INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT ANDERSON

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SEPTEMBER 21, 1994

JW: Dr. Anderson, I apologize for being late.

RA: You're not late; I just got half of an article written while I was waiting.

JW: I'm calling because I'm interested in the ways curriculum was changed for racial desegregation during the civil rights era. IDEA, then a branch of the Kettering Foundation, offered training or inservices to schools that wanted to try to reform their offering during those times. And they did it free of charge. There were at least 2 schools that took advantage of it.

RA: You're talking about the Kettering Foundation?

JW: Yeah.

RA: Are you aware that there was also an IGE program at the University of Wisconsin?

JW: You know, I have that information.

RA: The central figure in all that was Herbert Klausmeier and they had a bunch of people there and they had funding and they did a bunch of stuff. Klausmeier was something of an egotist and he made it clear that in his persuasion IGE was <u>his</u> show and that what they were doing was great. The fact is that what they were doing was great and they spent more of their time and energy in developing curriculum and instruction whereas the people in the Kettering IGE spent some time in curriculum and

instruction but mostly on organizational questions; staffing, time and energy and physical space, and so on.

JW: That was the impression that I had that IDEA did, was mostly staff...

RA: When you started out, you said that you had two things in mind: one was to find out the extent to which IGE was seen as a response to social issues, and especially to make...you better rephrase that for me again - to make better education available to the disadvantaged?

JW: That was one effort, certainly, in Longfellow School, which was here in Dayton. That was one of the things they were trying to do.

RA: You said there were two school?

JW: Yes, and they were very different. Longfellow in Dayton - well, there were certainly more schools that used it than two.

RA: Well, IGE had about 800 schools around the country.

JW: ...around the country, yeah.

RA: And another 150 in American schools overseas.

JW: Right.

RA: So that was a big operation. It may be that the schools for which you have data were particularly interesting examples with the impact...

RA: I think that's exactly right. That they were particularly interesting to me because one was in an integrated neighborhood and another was in an all-black neighborhood. And

both schools seem to have different thrusts; that is, the school in the integrated neighborhood wanted to try to maintain racial stability whereas in the black section, the all-black school, it was try to give African-Americans access to power. Kind of a black nationalist model.

RA: ...to maintain racial stability, you mean they were anti-desegregation?

JW: That was an argument that came up.

RA: Is that what you're saying? I need to know what you're saying.

JW: Yeah, the word that they used was "stability."

RA: Well, they didn't want to upset the white kids.

JW: They didn't want white flight to continue; it was already a naturally integrated neighborhood.

RA: Oh, all right. Racial stability, in that case, means something healthy then.

JW: That's the way they tried to explain it, but they ran into exactly this same misunderstanding.

RA: Let me interpret that for you. I never visited that school, but it would be my guess that if they perceived that they had a racially balanced school and that it was working well, they may have, and if they perceived that the white families were tending to flight, to move away, to get out of a school where there were a bunch of black kids, then they probably perceived IGE, which is a powerful arrangement for making a school a better school, they may have seen that as a course that would help

everyone, including the likely to flight people, that what their kids were getting was really wonderful. Now, let's take that a positive interpretation of what they were doing in that school.

JW: And I would think probably accurate.

RA: Now, one thing I'm curious about is - where you ever got the impression that IGE was tended particularly to influence the black and white problem?

JW: I never got the idea, except everywhere I turned in the Dayton - I'm interested in the Dayton case of desegregation, or at least that's where it began - Everywhere I turned - A liberal superintendent, for example, wanted to bring about natural integration and he set up middle schools with the individually guided education plan. And then Longfellow School, which received money from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to renovate its curriculum, and it took on IGE, Individually Guided Education. And I mentioned the other school, the black school, they were in the Model Cities Program, which was funded by HUD, and they had an educational component and they turned to IGE. It wasn't so much that I came up with that impression, it's just that everywhere I look IGE comes up.

RA: Now let me say - I worked very closely with IGE. That may be why you're calling.

JW: It's because John Paden told me you did and that I should talk to you.

RA: John Goodlad and I and a number of other people worked very closely with Dr. John Bonner, Paden and Ken Schultz, all of

those people who were then actively developing IGE. And I can tell you that although it was never not mentioned, I don't remember any of their publications or any of their rhetoric of which they talked about fixing the racial situation as a particular goal.

JW: That's exactly right. They never did.

RA: I'm sure that when we talked about it, or when we thought about it, the idea of making the school a more perfect school, within which the multi-ages and mixes of kids could survive, was always at the front of our minds.

JW: Oh, diversity was always a plus, but not a goal.

RA: Yes, but that would have been...IGE was a system in which there were basically three organizational components being developed and modeled.

JW: Right.

RA: One of them was non-graded - I'm not sure if we used the term very much then - but you know about non-graded, or do you?

JW: Could you just give me a brief definition?

RA: Non-graded is where you seek to eliminate the problems of promotion and retention, where you don't have kids competing with each other and where you use some general language, rather than first-grade, second-grade, third-grade and the kids' assignments were a status. Do you have this on tape?

JW: Yes, this is what...

RA: Well, you can play that one back! John Goodlad and I published a book, the first edition of it in 1959, called The Non-graded Elementary School, and the second edition in 1963. That was in the time when IDEA was warming up. At the same time, I was involved in the development of, I ran the first so-called "team-teaching school" in the world, in Massachusetts, starting in 1957. John Goodlad and I were both very much impressed with the emergence of an idea called "multi-grading" and later called "multi-aging" and now the most commonly recommended arrangement for packaging kids together, the multi-age, non-graded team. Those three components of the organization, the way a school ought to be, were central. That's how I got involved in it; that's how Goodlad got involved in it. If you read our books even now, we say very little about promoting the welfare of black kids or white kids or...

JW: ...or bringing them together in racial harmony.

RA: ...and risk, and so on. Rather, that all fits within a construct of a point of view to the effect that all kids can be successful in school. And this was enunciated by Benjamin Bloom in his famous book, not the Taxonomy one, but the Characteristics in School Learning one. And it was enunciated by Jerome Bruner in his book, The Process of Education, and it's currently being further enunciated by practically everybody, especially by a guy named Henry Lenlon, out at Stanford, who is talking about accelerating, not remediating. And arguing that one of the reasons kids who have been at the bottom of the barrel don't have

much success is that we give them _____ days when IDEA got underway and some of it came later. But in those early days, you might almost say "starry-eyed" about the notion that under the right conditions we could make it possible for every child to be successful. We thought that the way we could package them together and we could make available to them teams of teachers rather than individual teachers, self-contained, and the way we make use of hetergeneous, instead of homogeneous groupings, within which children could interact and become independent. And all of that fed right into any and all of the rhetoric of those days, Ed Mince, of course, was a particular rhetorician, with respect of what we should be doing for kids on the other side of the tracks. I'm taking a long time to say this, but I hope I'm making it clear, that we didn't really talk about IGE as a solution to the racial segregation problem. It was, yes, and we say that it was, but we didn't focus on that because we saw it as a solution to the mis-education of almost <u>every</u> kind of kid. Does that help?

JW: It certainly does; that is excellent. Let me ask one question, and that's about what we might call today "cooperative learning." I think you called it "modes."

RA: Did I use the word modes?

JW: Well, Paden used it in his <u>Thirty-five Points for IGE</u>. That was the one-on-one or groups of two, three or four.

RA: In those days we weren't quite as sophisticated as we are now. We talked about, not only different modes of learning,

but the context of the numbers, like kids one at a time, kids, two or three working together.

JW: Yes, that's...

RA: ...Seven or eight or so in a work group. Not more than a dozen in a special group, and anything after that where they were receiving information we saw...that was a large group. And our general attitude was that 25 was a dumb number because there isn't anything you can do with 25 that you can't do just as well aith 35 or 40 or 50 or 100, if you do it with all 25. When you break them up into different groups, that's another kind of a story. So that's one of the reasons that we tried to, over time, we tried to persuade people that we worked with to go into teaming where they could have 4 or 6 teachers and as many as 100 to 150 kids and the permeations and combinations of groupings that then became possible were almost infinite.

JW: The question that I wanted to ask is certainly that would be the case if those were the possibilities, but at Longfellow School, IDEA made a film of what went on. It was made sometime in the mid'70's. And I couldn't see any child working with any other child. All the examples of the child learning were of a child learning on his or her own. The team, the learning community, those team members met in a group. So it appeared almost as if there was truly individual instruction but it was directed by a team.

RA: I hoped that there was a lot of individual instruction, but it's too bad if the photographers didn't catch kids working

in pairs, and in triplets and in larger groups. I think that surprises me a little bit because some of the other IDEA films showed the other kids in modes.

JW: That's what he said. When I brought this same point up with him, he said my observation was distorting IGE; that it really was trying to get the kids learning to move into groups, that they should learn to be cooperative.

RA: What distorted it was the cameraman's failure to stick around long enough to see the whole gambit of groupings that were used. I'm not claiming that Longfellow was a great example of everything wonderful...

JW: Yeah, that might not be.

RA: But if it was operating the way it should have been running, then any movies or videotapes or films that were taken certainly would have shown kids one-on-one, by themselves, kids working in what we now call "cooperative grouping." Being aware of the big movement of the Johnson Brothers. What those guys are calling cooperative learning was billed as a routine, automatic part of IGE.

JW: That's what Paden said.

RA: Slavin thinks that he just invented it. But that's not the way it is. We didn't invent it either. This has been going on for 100 years.

JW: That's always the way.

RA: Are you doing this for a doctoral dissertation?

JW: No, I have my doctorate. I am a professor here at the University of Dayton.

RA: Are you doing it to get a book published?

JW: Yes.

RA: What other questions?

JW: Well, I think I'm on to something; I'm not sure that I am but I am really fascinated with the question of curriculum and racial desegregation. I guess part of it was that - Larry Cubin, How Teachers Taught, - it's not a very good history, but he does make an observation and that is that the two big changes in curriculum thinking came out, one came out in the progressive era, and one came out in the civil rights era. And he said that it's the individual education in the civil rights era and the Project Method or the Dewey School that was progressive. Even though you people didn't talk about IGE and racial integration, it just seems to always be there.

RA: Yeah, maybe I overstated when I said that we never talked about it. Because I know that in those days I did a lot of traveling around the country for them and also I helped them run training programs overseas, and in all of those cases we were certainly mindful of the fact that we needed to create an environment within which every kind of kid could have some kind of significant meaningful interaction with every other kind of kid. And this is why the busing of kids, at least theoretically, was an excellent idea because it was a way of trying to make sure that you could create opportunities for the rich kids, the poor

kids, the white kids, the black kids, the immigrant kids and old-timers, all to mix together in a healthy culture. And out of it was certain to come more significant learning.

JW: And part of that learning, of course, was being, in fact, cooperative or tolerant or accepting of the people.

RA: I suppose, yeah. I'm not sure...the word "tolerance" is a little bit troublesome because it suggests that somebody who knows that he's better tolerates somebody that is else. And what we really mean is racial acceptance, accept with cheerful and enthusiastic ways of diversity. And IGE, I'm not even sure if you look through the IGE literature how many times you would find the work "diversity." That may have been mostly because our vocabulary wasn't quite as good as it should have been. Because I think the way our heads and our hearts were working we had promoting diversity as a major value.

JW: Paden, when he talks about the IGE from the IDEA corporation, speaks about it in terms of a kind of acceptance of people with whom you work. That is, he says in the sessons when he goes around and he trains people on how to use IGE at their schools, he's amazed at how they look to somebody from the outside as having a correct answer but they won't think of their neighbors as being able to help them. A good part of the process seems to be to get them to just turn to their neighbors and realize that their neighbors are wonderful people, too.

RA: Their fellow professionals.

JW: Yes.

RA: I think he's right. The tradition of being self-contained - by the way, I call to your attention an article in the current issue of The Journal of Educational Research - do you belong to AERA?

JW: Yes.

RA: There's an article, I don't have it right here, but it's by Tyack.

JW: Yes.

RA: Have you seen that yet?

JW: I just got it yesterday.

RA: It's an interesting article. It's not a good article. Like you said, that the Cubain stuff isn't good...

JW: No, it's not. But sometimes there are bad articles that have good ideas in them.

RA: Yeah. And Tyack makes a couple of very interesting points. The title of it is The Grammar of Schooling. And what he and this other guy point to are the habits that people have which are so deeply entrenched in 150 years of thinking; that the teacher works at one grade level and becomes a master of that stuff or in a high school, becomes the Geometry II teacher and that's all that this guy lives for and breathes for, and when you get into that kind of lock on your head, then turning to your neighbors isn't a very attractice idea because they do different things and they have a different focus then you do. I think that's what Paden is talking about.

JW: Yeah. And one could see that as being a help in times of racial crisis. But it would be a help in any time, too. It's simply just good education or good human relations.

RA: But my impression, that I've already made clear to you I suppose, is that relieving racial tensions and helping people in different races and social classes to learn to, I won't say tolerate, to respect them and to enjoy one another's company. I think that sort of an outcome is certainly at the forefront of thinking of people who developed IGE. And this is true of Klausmeier's version as well as Kettering.

JW: Are those two models quite different?

RA: No. They focused on different things.

JW: The one on curriculum and the other on...

RA: I think Klausmeier's stuff is much more related to curriculum.

JW: Yeah.

RA: And it's good stuff; it's really too bad that he was such a selfish person because they could have worked together. They would have argued all the time about who owned the term, IGE.

JW: It's really a misnomer.

RA: It's not a good label.

JW: If you think about it, about what you said about people learning to accept and profit from associations with others, then it's a misnomer.

RA: You're right; it is a misnomer. And even if it were a correct nomer, it wouldn't be a good nomer; it's so awkward. When you say it it sounds like it was some kind of swiss cheese.

JW: It doesn't fall trippingly from the tongue. John Paden gave me a book by a fellow named Fleury. It was not a good book either.

RA: Who?

JW: Fleury. F-l-e-u-r-y. It was something about what happened to IGE.

RA: I haven't seen that.

JW: It came out of University Press.

RA: Was it about Paden?

JW: No, it was about - do you mean was it about the IDEA program?

RA: Yes.

JW: I remember it being mostly about IDEA.

SIDE TWO

JW: Now, I think the only thing that we lost was your point that you tried to work the activities in before dismissal so that extracurricular activities weren't a part of the program.

RA: There was no problem with it at all because they tried to get them in before the end of the school day. Now, like I said, if they had had no busing at the time it probably would have extended after school, but it was worked out very well in our building where the gym teacher; we had a basketball team made up of the 8th grade boys. It worked very well. We had a

cheerleading team and they tried to get practice in on the teacher's planning time and we would have games during the school day. So it worked out very effectively. We had no problems after school. However, at that time, ...

JW: Let me ask you a question that is probably impossible to answer and that is, just generally, how would you evaluate the desegregation; would you say that it worked to the good or the bad? Was it something that should have happened or shouldn't have happened?

RA: That is a very difficult question to answer. I am of the opinion that forcing anything on anybody is not good; I don't care whether it's a mixing of races, of whether it is mixing of something you don't like to eat, or whatever it is; forcing someone doing something sometime has a negative effect. I think things ought to be worked out naturally, let it come about naturally. And sometimes maybe some other things could cause things to work out naturally. One example, housing. If a person could go and buy a house wherever they choose and it happens to be an integrated neighborhood, fine. The children go to that school. I believe naturally things can work out because who says integration is good for anyone. What makes it so much better that we have black and white children together; we ought to have

equal opportunites in every school. We ought to have the same amount of resources in every school. We ought to have the same fine opportunities for every kid in this district, whether it's black, white, green, or whatever. And whether they go to school

with white kids or black kids shouldn't have any effect upon it. All schools should be equal. That is, in terms of supplies, equipment, opportunities, activities, whatever it may be; all schools should be alike. I don't think it takes busing to have one school superior over the other. My opinion is that things should happen naturally without forcing anyone to do anything.

I THINK THE ABOVE INFORMATION AT THE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO WAS A DIFFERENT PERSON.

RA:...I'm more of an administration and organization sort of person. And so I'm more interested in the mechanics of teaming, and so on. ...is more interested in the fundamental questions is how kids work together.

JW: At any rate, my point was that Fleury said that the number of schools that had joined them, the organization that used IGE, at any rate, the number that they used never increased and those that had been popular stopped adhering and following it closely. I guess that the point he is making is that it simply became unpopular.

RA: Became what?

JW: Unpopular, less popular. It lost its appeal. It that true. And if so, why so?

RA: I don't think it's true. When you say unpopular, it's sort of faded. It's like a beautiful rose that has served its time. It isn't that it became a bad rose, it just served its

purpose. When you read about how art changes, for instance, your expert article on what happened, you realized that there has never been a reform in American education yet that didn't wax and wane for a variety of reasons. One of which is that it never gets a _____ and there is so much...First of all, the people that teach and work in our schools are only semi-professionals. They get less hours of training than carpenters. And they take hardly any advance work. I wrote an article about this recently in which I pointed out that teachers, people who train for teaching, are the only so-called professional group that start out despising the content of their...it's true. It's considered that it's crap to take an education course. And the professors in physics, and so on, remind them of that every few days. Why are you laughing?

JW: It's true. It is!

RA: By the way, they aren't impressed by it because you never get into it deep enough. By comparison, everybody who starts out to be a lawyer or a doctor or an engineer or a dentist or whatever, they are scared to death of all the stuff they have to learn.

JW: That's right.

RA: The way I phrased it is that they are in awe of the body of knowledge they must master. Okay? People who come into teaching are not. They are glad when it's over so they can get out in "the real world" and get re-socialized. "This is how it is; never mind what they told you at the university. That's a

bunch of theory." But this is the way these kids are. And it's not very long before they're caught up in the, they're strangled by the old concepts, the old traditions, and those old traditions don't believe in the virtue of children or in the capability of all children. They think there are some good kids and some bad kids. And our job is to separate them out. Zap the bad kids with C's, and D's, and F's, and reward the good kids with A's and B's. I'm overstating it now because I want to make a strong criticism. But the fact is that those views pertain and so if somebody comes in with a new idea, whatever it is, people will buy it to some extent, but not if it interferes too much with the established routines. They may get pregnant or the husband moves away or they eventually retire and then the ones who were on the scene when this new idea came along are gone and they're replaced by people who never even heard of them. And that's what I think happened to IGE more than anything. It was the changing of the guard.

JW: Paden's assessment was a little bit different. He thought that part of it might be...in the 1970's the Kettering Foundation delivered the services free of charge. And now, of course, they're not. And that may have affected things.

RA: Well, I suppose that's right. I won't dispute that. People will value something where training continues, especially if it's free. When they have to pay for it, the administrators aren't so sure...

JW: And it's quite expensive, I'm sure.

RA: ...like getting new computers or something. There are a lot of entrepeneours in our business now and they're all fighting for those precious dollars. They hype their stuff up. You go to meetings like ASCD?

JW: Oh, yeah.

RA: You walk up and down the aisles at the exhibits? ...all the _____ that's going on?

JW: Oh, yes.

RA: This is big league competition here. They're all selling their stuff.

JW: It's true.

RA: I must be taking you down some primrose path.

JW: The question of why it would fade is an important question. And I don't think it has to do with any failure to achieve a social goal, you didn't have it. I'm not sure it has anything to do with failure to achieve an end either.

RA: I think the word fade may be all right, like the analogy with the rose. On the other hand, I think it's probably that it ran its course within communities and then the loyalists eventually disappeared and they got into fighting other issues. Some new person came around.

JW: Well, I really want to thank you for spending the time with me.

RA: That's okay. I hope something good will come from it.

JW: I hope so, too. I think it will. I think it's an exciting area. Just the question of curriculum and social reform.

RA: That could go on forever. What's happening right now is sort of depressing to me because we have bloated curriculum. We're trying to teach about 15 or 20 times as much stuff that really can be digested.

JW: And no one is really concerned.

RA: As a result, no one is really learning anything. I shouldn't have said that.

JW: That's true. And I'm also concerned that no one is very concerned about the questions of desegregation. That seems to be an issue...

RA: That probably is so.

JW: It's not an important issue.

RA: But there again look at the social forces on the scene: The Christian Coalition, whatever they call themselves, and the way they're attacking _____ and almost any other good idea that's come along. And they are making it very difficult for people in the schools to concentrate on making the necessary changes. So obviously teaching the McGuffey readers...

JW: Thank you very much for talking with me. Good-bye.

RA: Good-bye.